

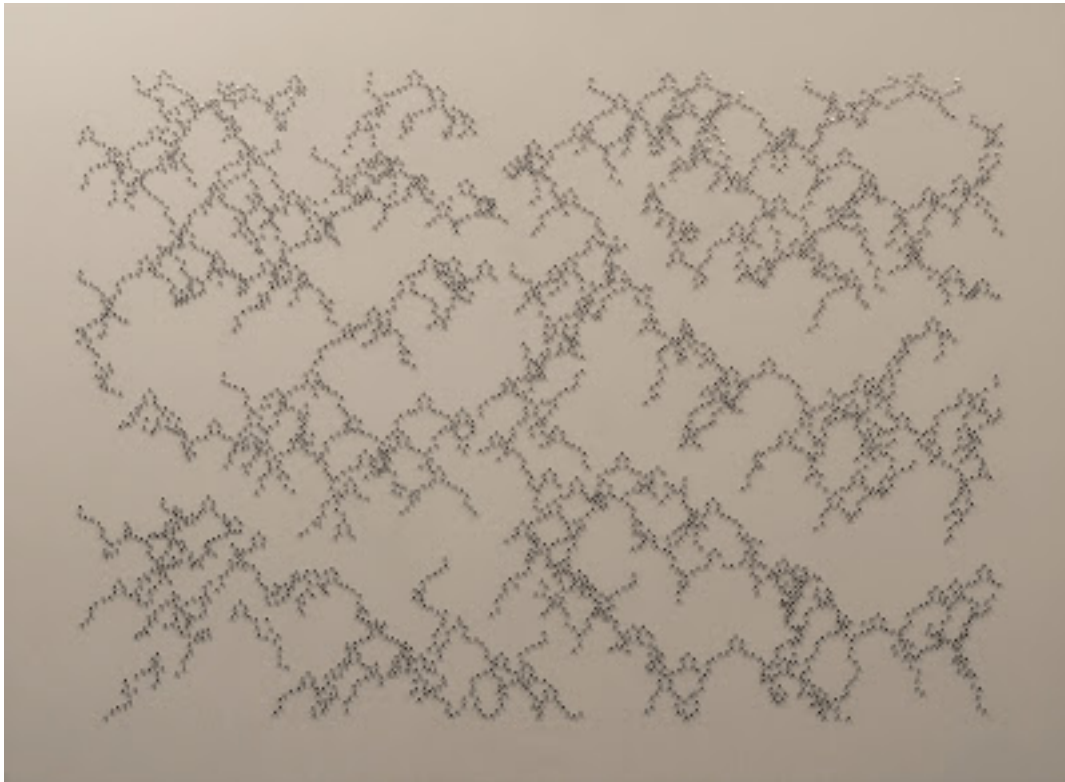
Out of Time: Reflections on Art and the Temporal Dimension

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For most of us, art and life occupy two divergent zones of experience. In the latter, which is characterized by the kind of ordinary, everyday consciousness by which we navigate our way through the world of tasks, responsibilities, and obligations, that which we call “living” occurs. Art, when it occurs, is something else, something bracketed off from usual. Each mode has its own distinct time.

In the zone of the ordinary, which is measured and to a large degree controlled by the clock, time is experienced as accelerated, urgent, oppressive; its invisible but ever-present force bears down on us as we rush to achieve, acquire, and accomplish, to become tomorrow more than we are today. Above all else, our ordinary consciousness is acutely aware of our limited time on earth, of our mortality, and it is ceaseless in its insistence that we are always, in the most profound sense, running out of time.

What art offers – whether in the making or the beholding – is a rupture in this ordinary, utilitarian consciousness, a break from the gnawing problem of our mortality, and a means of entry into a domain of experience that is generally regarded as more rarefied, more meaningful, and more richly rewarding than everyday life.



Taney Roniger, *Shadowscape #1*, 2012. Steel nails and shadows on painted wood panel, 39" x 53."

This shift in consciousness away from clock time and perpetual becoming into meaning, presence, or Being, is central to my practice as an artist. Before I even begin to work, I generally allow myself a prolonged period of transition, which is marked by a heightened awareness of my visual surroundings and a sustained focus on letting the activity of perception gradually eclipse the torrent of arising, clashing, and dissipating thought patterns that constitute my mental landscape at any given time. With the increasing internal stillness and silence, another kind of time gradually begins to emerge. Distinct from psychological time, which knows only the conditioned past and the projected future, this other kind of time presents itself as a unified whole; indivisible and unbounded, it unfolds not in a linear progression but outward, in all directions simultaneously. Here, categories such as fast and slow, now and later, here and there, no longer pertain, since there is only here/now.

Outside clock time and fully immersed in this other one is where I do the inarticulable (and most difficult) aspect of my work. Temporarily released from intellectual activity, which is inextricably bound up with clock time, my mind shifts to another kind of knowing, where “truths” are felt somatically rather than apprehended by thought. Here, visual relationships and configurations of form whose meaning defies language and logic begin to arise, cohere, and reverberate with each other, and I follow their lead. Later, after returning to clock time, the analytical work of editing, rearranging, refining, and understanding can begin, but this is always preceded by – and wholly in the service of – the former activity.

As much as my experience of the non-temporal dimension is grounded in art, there are certainly means other than art of arriving at it. Many of us have had the experience of being dislodged from time – rudely and abruptly pushed out of it – by shock, trauma, or profound grief. But surely there are avenues of access that we can pursue at will, and on a daily basis. If my entry into the atemporal is catalyzed by a period of acute attention to perception, then surely this can be practiced in the absence of art – and indeed right in the cacophony of everyday life. All that is required is the conscious imposition of a pause – a deliberate slowing down and stepping back – coupled with a willingness to suspend the demands of becoming in favor of something else. If this can be achieved anywhere, anytime – if indeed the presence of this other time never really leaves us, but is only made manifest when we choose to attend to it – then perhaps one of art’s highest functions is to serve as a reminder of this fact. Seen in this light, art and life need not be two distinct zones of experience but are perhaps two overlapping and mutually enriching modes of consciousness. If ordinary consciousness ceaselessly reminds us that we are running out of time, we would do well to also remember that there is an “into” on the far side of the “out of.” There is a “there” there, if we want it.